

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. An apparatus for intercepting telephone calls on a telephone channel connected to a telephone, comprising:
 - a. a ring detector, in communication with the telephone channel, that is capable of detecting an incoming telephone call and that generates a ring signal upon detection of a incoming telephone call;
 - b. a user input that is capable of receiving an input from a user indicating that the user desires not to be called;
 - c. a counter, responsive to the user input, programmed to count a selected amount of time from assertion of the user input; and
 - d. a delay circuit, responsive to the counter, the ring signal and the user input, that is programmed to:
 - i. allow the telephone to ring if an incoming call has been detected and if more than the selected amount of time has passed since the user input was last asserted; and
 - ii. prevent the telephone from ringing if an incoming call has been detected and if less than the selected amount of time has passed since the user input was last asserted.
2. The apparatus of Claim 1, further comprising a telephone selection circuit, operatively coupled to a plurality of telephones, that includes a user input that indicates to the controller which of the plurality of telephones are to have ringing inhibited.
3. The apparatus of Claim 1, further comprising a message playback circuit, responsive to the controller, that plays a message to an incoming caller when the controller inhibits ringing of the telephone.

4. The apparatus of Claim 1, further comprising a visual incoming call indicator that provides a visual indication that a telephone call is incoming while the telephone inhibited from ringing.
5. The apparatus of Claim 4, wherein the visual incoming call indicator comprises an indicator light.
6. The apparatus of Claim 4, wherein the visual incoming call indicator comprises:
 - a. a video display generator that generates an icon representing an incoming call; and
 - b. a video display circuit that superimposes the icon onto a video display.
7. The apparatus of Claim 6, wherein the video display circuit comprises a text message generator.
8. The apparatus of Claim 6, wherein the video display circuit comprises a symbol generator.
9. A method of intercepting telephone calls on a telephone channel connected to a telephone and a user input that indicates that a user desires not to be called, comprising the steps of:
 - a. detecting an incoming telephone call on the telephone channel;
 - b. generating a ring signal upon detection of a incoming telephone call;
 - c. determining if the user input has been asserted by the user; and
 - d. allowing the telephone to ring if an incoming call has been detected and if more than a selected amount of time has passed since the user input was last asserted; and
 - e. preventing the telephone from ringing if an incoming call has been detected and if less than the selected amount of time has passed since the user input was last asserted.

-